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ABSTRACT

An anecdotal account is provided of Lee John Betts's first year as the president of Frederick Community College (FCC). The first sections cover the application process, his first visit to the college, issues involved in relocating, administrative tasks accomplished during the first week, and Betts's first meeting with FCC's board of trustees. The next section summarizes Betts's first address to the college faculty, entitled "Eight Goals for the Future." After reviewing activities that were undertaken to get acquainted with community leaders, college staff, and students, Betts highlights some of his efforts to establish a campus presence in community events, improve relations between FCC and a prestigious independent college in the city, and lay down roots in the community. Subsequent sections focus on the establishment of a Professional Development Council at the college, and review the other initiatives undertaken during the first eight months of Betts's presidency, including the difficult process of instructional reorganization. The next sections look at problems that were encountered, including decreasing compliance and increasing assertiveness among faculty and administrators; difficulties with a building project; and budget complications. Following concluding comments, a brief postscript by Professor Phyllis Hamilton provides a faculty member's perspective on Betts's first year as president. (JMC)

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REFLECTIONS ON THE FIRST YEAR OF A COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENT

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October, 1987

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INTRODUCTION

As a young man I had worked closely for seven summers with my father, a small building contractor. He taught me how to paint houses, dig trenches for footings, and a myriad of other practical skills. Above all, he taught me how to enjoy working with my hands and how to experience the satisfaction of a project completed with pride and expertise. Those seven summers with dad were major building blocks in my life.

One of the regrets of my professional life is that my family have had so little awareness of the day-to-day experiences I have experienced as a college president. Our children had matured and left home prior to my becoming president. Distance and age have kept my father and his generation from sharing firsthand my presidential experiences. I write these reflections for myself and for them.

I write them also as a gift to many friends and colleagues in our new community and college. I would like them to experience vicariously some of my struggles and doubts, joys, and satisfactions. Their guidance, patience, friendship, tolerance, and respect have been invaluable in making my first year at Frederick Community College so pleasantly memorable.

My sincere appreciation is extended to Associate Professor Phyllis Hamilton who wrote the thoughtful postscript which appears at the end of this document.

"In the Beginning..."

REFLECTIONS ON THE FIRST YEAR OF

A COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENT

The Phone Call

"Dr. Betts, this is Jack Kussmaul from Frederick, Maryland. You are one of four...."

He paused. I was puzzled. The voice was unfamiliar; the message was unclear. I was one of four "what" I asked myself?

Suddenly, the pieces began to fit together. Two months before I had applied for the presidency of Frederick Community College. Dr. Kussmaul was the retiring president of the college. The process was moving with alacrity compared with most presidential searches.

"Can you come for an interview with the Board on December 8?" The enthusiasm in my voice could not be disguised as I checked my calendar. In reality, I would have cancelled or postponed anything that would have conflicted with that invitation (with the possible exception of my own funeral).

Maryland--two hours from three of our four children and all of our grandchildren, other family and our roots--my wife, Marj, was ecstatic. After eleven years in the Midwest, we might be heading home.

By the morning of the interview, I was one of three; one finalist had withdrawn. The preceding two weeks had been crammed with research, telephone calls, quiet prayers and anticipation.

The interview went well. As soon as we returned to Iowa, I received a phone call from the Chairman of the Board. I was now one of two finalists. One other candidate was to be interviewed. Less than a week later I was handed a telephone message during a college business meeting. It was from the Chairman of the Board of Frederick Community College.

I was one of one.

Visiting Celebrity

The newspaper clippings, with notes from unfamiliar names who would soon be friends, arrived almost daily. Selecting a new college president in a city of 35,000 was front page news; so was my salary. In Iowa my imminent departure was noted on page three in the local paper. Such is public life.

The first visit at the end of January was accompanied with all the regal trappings a community college could, in good conscience, justify. Courtesy visits to political and business leaders, briefings by key staff, a news conference, dinner with faculty and staff--all seemed to blur together. My adrenalin was pumped. Every word was analyzed, frequently overanalyzed, to try to decipher what kind of a person, what new directions the community college would be assuming. It was fun and exhausting.

Going Into Debt...Again

The old Victorian home overlooking the Mississippi River in Iowa, which my wife and I had painstakingly remodeled over a five year period, was sold in 21 days--a minor miracle in the recession plagued Midwest. In March we journeyed east to find a new home. We discovered that housing costs were 50-60 percent higher than in Iowa. We wanted an older home, downtown, with a two car garage--anything but a split level. We settled for a newer, split level home with a carport, just outside of town but near the college. It was everything we hadn't wanted. The final price was $50,000 above what we had hoped, initially, we could negotiate. We loved it; soon it would be home.

The First Week

The end of June arrived. My retiring predecessor, Dr. Kussmaul, provided an excellent orientation to college and community. An appearance before the Lions Club, numerous luncheon meetings, student orientations, and an enormous pile of papers, reports and analyses helped make my first week productive and a bit overwhelming.

A new secretary needed to be selected immediately. All five candidates were internal; all were personable and competent people. I learned much about the college from them. My choice would prove to be excellent.

On July fourth I joined the downtown patriotic celebrations, even competing in the 5K race. There are so few occasions when a college president feels comfortable appearing in public in racing shorts, an old tee shirt and a sweatband. However, this was one. I decided, "I'm going to like this town."

The First Board of Trustees Meeting

The first Board meeting is always a momentous occasion for a new president. I had participated in and shared responsibility for the Board agenda many times while serving as President of Muscatine Community College and as a Vice Chancellor in the Eastern Iowa Community College District. This would be my first solo performance. Fortunately, the outgoing president's secretary agreed to assist with this her final Board meeting.

As I approached the Board Room I was enthusiastically ambushed by five community people very concerned that the college had recently decided to terminate the Dental Assistant program because of low enrollment. I invited them to my office for a few minutes and they voiced their concerns. I listened and assured them of time on the agenda.

The Board Room was packed with community people concerned about the program's termination, members of the press, faculty and staff interested in agenda items. All were curious to see the new president in action. Every word was carefully monitored. First impressions are so long remembered. The agenda proceeded. Our community visitors were well received and heard.

Confident smiles on the faces of faculty, staff, and Board members began to replace expressions of concern as the meeting ended and the press approached for questions. From all sides congratulations were offered. The meeting had gone well. Marjie wanted to hear all; and over a glass or two of wine, I began to unwind and share the details. It was after 2:00 a.m. before I could relax enough to sleep.

Eight Goals for the Future

I had been asked by Dean Bill Rodgers to speak to college faculty at an open convocation prior to the beginning of classes. It was an ideal occasion to share some goals around which the college might rally in the future. After only seven weeks on the job my analysis of the college was far from complete. Nevertheless, some solid strengths and a few significant concerns were emerging.

The academic achievements of college graduates were impressive. At the University of Maryland our alumni were achieving Grade Point Averages at or near the top when compared with other community college transfers. Our nursing students ranked first in the state among all collegiate institutions on the National Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses. Obviously the faculty was competent and academic programs were strong.

The financial and business areas of the college were most capably administered. Our campus buildings and grounds were attractively maintained, and our student development programs were comprehensive and well staffed. The institution was already an excellent one.

Among my concerns was an apparent lack of communication, both internal and external. We needed to do a better job of interacting with our community. Few structured opportunities existed for faculty to approach the president with ideas and concerns.

I also noted a hesitancy in the style of some administrators and faculty. Some were bolder; some, more tentative. I had been used to a more assertive and adventuresome management team; but I was new and they were cautious.

Of some concern was the apparent lack of an integrated institutional operating style. Marketing, publications, staff development, resource development -- all were functions performed by a variety of offices with little or no coordination. Sometimes this segmented approach worked surprisingly well; sometimes it worked poorly. There were few occasions when people came together to develop programming across division lines.

Eventually, my thoughts crystallized and I began to put together my presentation, "Eight Goals for the Future." These became our primary goals for our first year together. They remain major goals as we enter year two.

1. Strengthen our Institutional Commitment to Excellence in all areas.
2. Expand and Promote Educational Opportunities for all county citizens.
3. Create an Exciting, Energizing, and Innovative Institutional Environment.
4. Promote Student Learning and Development.
5. Increase Internal Communication and Cooperation.
6. Develop Community Partnerships to Address Educationally Related Needs.
7. Expand and Integrate Professional Development Opportunities.
8. Experience Frederick Community College Becoming the Finest Community College of its type in the country.

I concluded my presentation with these words.

> We may already be the finest community college in Maryland. I believe we have the capability to become the finest community college of our size and type in the nation. At the same time I am hopeful that there are hundreds of other community colleges in America with the same goal. The communities we serve deserve nothing less. I cannot make Frederick Community College the finest community college in the nation. You cannot do it either. But all of us, working together, can. Let's give it a shot!

My remarks were received enthusiastically, and I was asked to do a repeat performance for the adjunct faculty (150 capable professionals) at their Saturday morning orientation meeting.

Getting Acquainted

So many people to get to know both within and beyond the college. Where to begin? On whom should I focus? The five months from August through December were a time to get acquainted with people both within the college and beyond.

I began a series of one-to-one meetings with community leaders: the superintendent of schools, bank presidents, the newspaper publisher, the mayor, county commissioners, and various other community and business leaders. My wife, Marj, graciously agreed to host several dinner parties. Among our first guests were senior members of the faculty and the members of the College Foundation.

During one dinner party we were hosting a number of people in our spacious Florida room when it began to rain. To our dismay the glass roof, which had been totally reconstructed prior to our move, began to leak. We spent a nervous evening moving tables and chairs around to avoid several persistent drips. A sense of humor and my wife's composure persevered and the unplanned excitement did little to dampen our fun.

Perhaps the most significant decision I made during my first months on the job was to establish the Faculty-President Roundtable. It was an idea I had borrowed from Michael Crawford, my mentor while I was at the Eastern Iowa Community College District. Every month five faculty, chosen by their peers, met with me to discuss, informally, whatever was on their minds. We had different perspectives. By sharing we learned to

understand and appreciate each other as persons and to gain a more unified perspective of our common mission. As the year progressed, we approached each other increasingly as colleagues and friends.

Other small informal discussion meetings were held periodically with part-time faculty, supportive staff, and students. All were important in helping build trust and understanding between college staff and the new president.

The Watermelon Extravaganza

One of the joys of working in academe is the daily encounter with students. There are times when these encounters are less than totally pleasant; but these times are few.

How does a new president get to know some of the students in a manner that is neither awkward or intimidating? I tried a few traditional strategies: lunchtime in the cafeteria, a special breakfast for student leaders, a wiener roast. The college had several student organizations; however, few of those that existed were well organized in early fall. Something unique was begging to be invented.

The First Annual Presidential Watermelon Extravaganza provided an opportunity for faculty, staff and students to let down their hair and have a lot of fun together. We planned eight ridiculous events all featuring watermelons or parts of watermelons. They ranged from seed spitting to relay races. We pushed watermelons with our heads and our rumps; we tossed watermelon rind rings over stakes (a la quoits); we balanced rounded sections on our heads.

Although the five teams which competed were composed mostly of faculty and staff, over 100 students gathered to watch the celebration and a few joined in. The staff and faculty shared a side of themselves that students had seldom seen. They saw us as real people who knew how to have fun and enjoy life.

Capturing the Corporate Mile

More than a dozen of us at FCC had committed ourselves to capturing the Corporate Mile in Frederick's annual "In the Streets" festival. It was mid October and Saturday morning was pleasantly cool. Fifteen college competitors (thrice the number required for a team) stretched and jogged in anticipation. For the preceding month we could be seen at lunchtime and late in the afternoon puffing and sweating our way into some semblance of athletic readiness. We ranged in age from our early 30's to mid 50's. We were faculty, secretaries, dean and president. Two were women; the rest, men.

The competition was totally unknown. We assumed the worst: that each team would be dominated by a core of eager, young talented runners. We hoped for respectability.

The gun sounded too quickly and I found myself at the rear of the pack. At the age of 52 my aerobic system avoids quick beginnings. By the quartermile mark most of the lead runners were out of sight beginning to head up the only modest hill on Market Street. I began to pass a few competitors. My pace was too comfortable; I picked it up a bit.

Just past the half mile mark the hill ended; the road made its only turn, and suddenly the finish line was six blocks ahead. My pace had been styled by years of 5K and 10K running. It was too slow. I accelerated and began to pass others. The lead pack was already approaching the finish line when I hit the three quarter mark.

"Six fifteen...sixteen...seventeen"... the timer chanted as I hit the chute. I had finished 10th on the team, 16th overall. FCC had taken four of the first five places. The first corporate mile trophy was ours.

Reacquaintance with an Old Friend

Dr. Martha Church and I had worked together during the evolution of the Servicemember's Opportunity College consortium in the early seventies. It had been a dozen years since we had seen each other. About the same time I accepted a position in Kansas, she had left the Middle States Association of School and Colleges to become president of Hood College, a prestigious independent college in Frederick.

When I first heard of the Frederick presidency, I called Martha to check on the opportunity. She spoke highly of the college.

Within weeks of my arrival we met in her office to reflect on old times and share our dreams and visions for higher education in Frederick. Her support was most important during that first year.

Later in the semester we invited her to FCC to be the speaker at our first "Management Roundtable." She shared with an appreciative audience of approximately 30 college managers and would-be-managers more than a dozen principles which had guided her successful management style. In addition to learning from her, the event was an occasion for bringing our two colleges closer together.

Within a few months she would be selected by her peers as one of America's top 100 college and university presidents.

Putting Down Roots

College presidents do not find it difficult to meet people in a new community. Each service club and civic organization recognizes in them a fresh face and a free speaker. I was more than willing to oblige, desiring to get to know people and to be known and identified with the college. Frederick was an unusually friendly community, reminiscent of many Midwestern towns in its style and approachability. Many new friends invited Marj and me to dinner, introducing us to other new people. Within a month, I was invited to join the Rotary Club of Frederick and gladly accepted the invitation.

This was the ninth community in which I had established residency since I began my professional life nearly 30 years before. My wife had had an even more extensive pilgrimage, residing from coast to coast and for four years in Japan.

Our Christian faith was important to both of us. The discipline of worship and the friendship of people with similar values and ideals had always been a source of strength and purpose. The Presbyterian Church we began attending in July, 1986, was far different than the one it would become by July, 1987. Over the course of twelve months it would be transformed from a gathering of rather distant, dispirited people to a warm congregation, alive with purpose and vitality.

The change was directly related to the arrival of a dynamic, unselfconscious new pastor. Measuring no more than 5'1" tall and weighing

approximately one hundred pounds and frequently sporting Baby Jessie on her hip, our first woman minister captured the hearts and admiration of all. Ginger and her husband Guy, an aspiring opera singer, became our very close friends. Her dedication to her calling was complemented by an unusually natural, unaffected style. She was always herself. I found her vitality and her unassuming style contagious. In turn, she valued the advice of an older, somewhat more experienced friend.

Other special people entered my life. Dr. Francis "Fritz" Reinberger, a former chairman of the college board and a marvelously gifted adjunct professor, dropped by weekly to offer encouragement and advice. Certain staff and faculty became a source of strength and guidance. Philosophically, I was opposed to establishing special friendships within the college, but I tried to evidence in some manner my appreciation.

As the months passed and spring arrived both Marj and I sensed that our roots were growing deeper in our new home community. At the edge of the Catoctin Mountains, within an hour's drive of Washington and Baltimore, four hours from the ocean, yet away from urban congestion and air pollution, Frederick County was in many ways an idyllic place in which to live.

A Very Special Board

After a few months at the college the Board and I determined that it was time to get away and become better acquainted. A retreat was planned. It would be an occasion to share goals and explore problem areas; but, mostly, it proved to be a time when we could relax and enjoy each other informally, as unique and special people.

The first day we worked hard, breaking only for meals. Finally at 9:00 p.m. it was time to relax. Retreating to the commons area, we broke out liquid refreshments and munchies. Much to my surprise our Board chair, Dr. George Smith, emerged with a banjo and began to play. It was midnight before we stopped singing the old songs, many of which I hadn't heard in years.

While some of us jogged together the next morning, our spouses walked. It was only a two day retreat, but we grew closer during that time than during the preceding four months combined. They were a very special Board--concerned, informed, comfortable, and supportive. There are few things more important than a president's relationship to the Board. That weekend we began to feel very good about each other. That feeling continued to grow.

The Holiday Season

The holiday season signalled the imminent conclusion of my first full semester at FCC. Musical recitals, plays, college and community parties, church celebrations--all mixed together in the pleasant cacophony of the Christmas season. Budgeting and other work needed to be accomplished, but the diversions were most welcome.

December 7 was a special evening. Over 300 faculty, staff and spouses came to the college Christmas dinner at the Sheraton Inn. The Jazz band played; the college choir sang. Some danced; all ate. We were celebrating the end of a fine beginning. College and president felt good about each other. Trust, comfort, and understanding were building.

As I drove home that evening I reflected that it had been almost exactly a year to the day that I had interviewed for the presidency at that very same hotel. A silent prayer of thanksgiving could not be repressed. Tough times were ahead in the spring, but now it was time to relax with family and friends, enjoy the holidays, and forget responsibilities for a while.

Snow

"I can never remember whether it snowed for six days and six nights when I was twelve or whether it snowed twelve days and twelve nights when I was six." ---Dylan Thomas.

I had lived in Kansas, Iowa, New England and upstate New York. I had encountered snow. As we left Iowa we breathed a sigh of relief... no more severe, snowy winters were anticipated. We were headed for the Washington, D.C. area, below the Mason-Dixon line.

I was awakened about 5:30 a.m. one January morning by the phone. Dr. Jon Larson, the Dean of Institutional Services, and I discussed the ominous weather forecast. When I peered outside, not a flake had fallen. Weather forecasts are wrong from time to time, I concluded. We decided to try to get the day in. By 8:00 a.m. when I arrived on campus a half inch of snow had fallen... nothing by Iowa standards. The receptionist's phone was ringing constantly. The first irate students appeared at my office about 8:05 a.m. More followed. By 8:30 a.m. I could hardly see the Field House 200 yards away. The Dean and I caucused again. He would call for further information while I agreed to drive around outside. My radial tires held firm, but the snow was nearing two inches in depth. I had blown it; we could not stay open. An irate parent called; his daughter's car had slipped off the road into a ditch. The car was damaged.

By noon snow depth was nearing six inches and the college was closed. Nevertheless we had scheduled the opening of bids on a $5,000,000 multi-purpose building for two o'clock, and we could not cancel.

Eight of the nine contractors arrived on time and the bids were opened hastily. They averaged more than a million dollars above the estimate. We were shocked and disappointed. Now what?

By 4:00 p.m. the snow was approximately nine inches deep (it would reach 15 inches by the next morning). I was finally headed home. It was the end of a less than perfect day.

The Professional Development Council

To my knowledge there had been no occasion in recent years when the entire faculty and staff had met together as a total institution for any professional venture. Frederick Community College sponsored a number of decentralized staff development opportunities, but there was no common institutional professional development focus.

I appointed a task force of seven persons, representative of the entire college, to plan a college-wide staff and professional development program. The Council scheduled a major event as a kick-off for the winter-spring semester. It was an ambitious endeavor.

Over 150 full and part-time faculty, administration, and supportive staff attended the mid-January workshop in the Field House. It was scheduled for early evening to accommodate part-time faculty who were frequently employed elsewhere during the day.

"What do we want faculty and staff to become?" was the question the Council asked me to address during the opening session. Following an excellent meal, staff selected from among eight different, well-prepared workshop topics. In addition, the Council introduced a new wellness program which enrolled within a month over 50 percent of full-time college personnel. We were soon sweating and groaning together.

The evening's program was remarkably successful; not a single major hitch was apparent. During the next week the Council and I celebrated over lunch. Justifiably, they were proud of a strong beginning.

What's Happening? - Maybe Too Much!

The second semester began with promise. Enrollment was up 5-7 percent over the preceding Spring. Much was happening everywhere... perhaps too much!

Among the new ventures we had initiated as a college during our first eight months together were a ....

- o Wellness program
- o Professional Development Council
- o Minority Students Task Force
- o President's Management Team
- o Clergy-college task force
- o Community Literacy Coalition
- o Business and Industry program
- o Faculty-President's Roundtable
- o Development program
- o Faculty Association
- o Thirtieth Anniversary Planning Task Force

One day a faculty member asked me if I knew how many groups I had organized on campus and who was on each. I wasn't sure. We had moved out on a variety of fronts. Perhaps we were trying to do too much, too fast. My suspicions were confirmed later that spring. I had not allowed time for major interruptions, time consuming problems. They would come in time, and for a while I would be overwhelmed.

Instructional Reorganization

The honeymoon ended abruptly on this issue; but long-term relationships were strengthened with its resolution.

Shortly after my arrival, I discussed with Dr. Rodgers, Dean of the College and the chief instructional administrator, some administrative concerns that both he and I shared. There were four divisional managers and 200 faculty to be supervised, evaluated, and hired. One division chairperson was responsible for approximately 50 part-time and 18 full-time faculty. It was not an effective structure. Dr. Rodgers and I discussed the possibility of moving some day to a model which would utilize faculty as department chairs and program managers. We were aware that next year's budget picture looked bleak, precluding an early revision.

In late fall one of our ablest division chairpersons, Agnes Kemerer, surprised me by announcing her retirement. She had guided our Nursing Program to the premier position in the state. Dean Rodgers and I reviewed our options and decided this might be an opportunity to move to a new management model in instruction. We agreed on the concept in general terms, and I asked him to work out the details with instructional colleagues.

By February a model had been proposed and I had responded to it with recommended modifications. Ten faculty, most to be selected by their peers, would serve as chairs of six departments and managers of four

vocational-technical program areas. I felt good about the concept. It would involve over 20 percent of the faculty in instructional management, providing more oversight and services to our sizable (150) contingent of adjunct faculty. Best of all, it could be accomplished within our existing budget.

I was shocked when I learned that faculty were very suspicious and wary of the reorganization plan. The first person to share her displeasure with me only partially understood the plan. I was indignant when I learned that someone was complaining to persons outside the college about the reorganization plan which was only in early draft form. Obviously, I had not communicated well with faculty; we had not involved them in the early planning process.

Fortunately, concurrent with this agonizing wrinkle, a new organization was emerging with my blessing and encouragement--the Faculty Association. Their able chair, Phyllis Hamilton, discussed the issue with me and sponsored a forum to which Dean Rodgers and I were invited to discuss the plan with a roomful of interested faculty. We met for nearly two hours, explaining the concept and the options under consideration. Faculty reactions were straightforward. By the end of the meeting a consensus had emerged. Most liked the general concept; others were willing to give it a try. I appointed a small group of faculty who worked with the dean to resolve certain areas of concern. The reorganization was underway with faculty support.

Postscript: Early in my second year I visited informally with several department chairs and program managers. To a person they were enthusiastic about the new model and their new roles. Excellent people had been selected for each new position. They reinforced my bias that good people can make almost any organizational model work well.

Evaporating Compliance; Emerging Assertiveness

My early concern about the apparent hesitancy and conservative posture of faculty and staff was rapidly disappearing. The faculty were soon to evidence their vitality and unhappiness over salary issues. Some administrators also were gaining in courage.

During one administrative meeting, one administrator and I went toe-to-toe on an issue on which we were not in agreement. We both got rather testy and evidenced dogged persistence. I had mixed feelings following the session. On the one hand, I felt that I had had to defend my position forcefully in a public management meeting, while on the other hand I was pleased that the administrator had the "guts" to argue assertively with me. The next day an observer of our confrontation commended my stance. "You're such a nice guy; I wasn't sure until yesterday that you could be tough enough when necessary." His comments gave me new perspectives on the incident and on how I might be perceived.

As with all of us I had inherited a variety of interpersonal traits from my parents, adding a generous touch of individual uniqueness. Mother had bequeathed to me the ability to relate comfortably and easily with a wide variety of people; she also shared with me her temper. From my father I learned how to evidence quiet dignity; he also schooled me well in the art of stubbornness, which I prefer to view as unrelenting perseverance. From both of them I learned to care deeply for people.

There have been times when I have wished one or more of these traits were less in evidence. During the spring the press of many activities and several unanticipated crises brought out more anger at times than I felt was appropriate. But as each crisis was resolved, I gained in confidence, and the college and its new president gained in mutual understanding and respect. We were getting to know and accept one another as real persons.

Building Catastrophes

The Multi-Purpose Building had been a dream at the college for nearly six years. It was to include a fine arts center and auditorium, a student center, and the Student Development Division. By the time I arrived, years of planning and funding negotiations had transpired. Blueprints and models were in hand. Groundbreaking appeared imminent. Unfortunately, we would have to wait ten months before it would finally occur.

With unhurried pace, two or three state agencies reviewed everything four times. Finally, we were ready in December for the specifications to be distributed and the bids to be received. However, when the lowest bid came in 25 percent over the cost estimate, we were not prepared... nor were our funding agencies, the county and state, who would share the cost.

Suddenly, we needed to obtain another $1,000,000 dollars. The county responded within a week with guarded generosity. Impatiently we waited for state agencies to confer, review, and decide. One week before the bids were to expire, we got the word. They would provide us with their share of the base bid, only (no alternates), but we must award the contract to another contractor than the one we had presumed would get the bid. We argued intensely. Our Board was indignant; but the State's decision prevailed.

Unfortunately the second contractor, after the two months' delay in the bid review process, was unable to accept the bid award. Two weeks later the contract was finally awarded to yet a third contractor and the funding

was confirmed. In the meantime a fourth contractor had charged the college, through government officials, with inappropriate bid specifications. Delicate communications and careful scrutiny of the total bidding procedure led to additional delays but eventual resolution.

Finally, the contract signed, groundbreaking was scheduled for early May. During the reception which preceded, it poured. But at the appointed hour the weather cleared, the sun came out, and, spades in hand, we walked to the site. At last we were underway.

We were to encounter rock the next month while digging footings; the additional cost was $125,000. Later a sinkhole appeared after a heavy rain; but nothing could stop our progress now.

Budget Complications

The budgeting process was more extensive and complicated than others with which I had been familiar. In October it began with internal planning. I was pleased that budget input began at the "grass roots" level.

There were three primary sources for our funding: the state, the county, and student tuition. For the preceding eleven years state funding for community colleges, when adjusted for inflation, had declined nearly 30 percent. The county's MARC (minimum funding estimate) was announced in November. It was below what we had hoped it would be.

In December our comptroller, Martin Crabbs, projected a $300,000 shortfall between next year's anticipated revenue and projected budget expenses. Marty was a most able and congenial budget manager. Early in my presidency I gained great respect for his judgement. Nevertheless, the picture looked bleak.

In January the governor's budget was submitted by the outgoing governor. Again, there was no additional funding proposed for community colleges. But we were hopeful that the newly elected Governor, William Donald Schaefer, would respond positively to our supplemental budget request.

Unfortunately, by March it was clear that no state funding increase would be forthcoming. By an adjustment in state procedures we were scheduled to receive $48,000 less from the state during the following year than we had in the present year, even though our enrollment had increased significantly.

We went back to the drawing board, recalculating income and projected expenditures. We put a cap on spending to force a surplus that we could carry over into the following year. We reexamined the proposed budget and made adjustments. Nevertheless, we concluded that we must appeal to the county commissioners for additional funds. Even with a ten percent increase in tuition, we projected a shortfall of nearly $300,000.

Ever since anyone could remember, salary negotiations had been handled in a most favorable manner. There was no bargaining unit at the college. Yet every year faculty and staff at the college received salary adjustments from the county similar to or identical with the teachers in the local school system.

At the eleventh hour, we discovered that the county would play no role in salary determinations at either the college or the local school system. Because of our discouraging financial projections, only two percent had been budgeted. The County Commissioners traditionally provided the college the amount needed to grant a pay raise equal in percentage to that given public school teachers. In contrast, the local school board, recipients of additional state aid, had budgeted a six percent salary increase. We were in trouble. It was already early May.

When the news spread across campus, morale tumbled. On the following Monday, I received two letters from faculty expressing strong dissatisfaction. By Tuesday, the letters had increased to six. Their numbers multiplied for several days. Most were written respectfully; some were not. Several staff members confided to me that there was much unhappiness.

I had made a terrible mistake. The comptroller and I were working night and day to find additional money for salaries. Expenditures were being halted, the projected budget was being slashed, and strategies were being developed to obtain additional funding.

However, I had failed to communicate to our faculty and staff what we were doing. On Wednesday I met with Phyllis Hamilton and Shirley Davis, the outgoing and incoming chairs of the Faculty Association. For a moment I lost my composure with two colleagues who had been close allies. I was disappointed in myself. The pressure was getting to me.

I met next with the president of the Supportive Personnel Association, but I knew this was not enough. On Friday morning I addressed all interested faculty and staff in the auditorium. I explained what had happened, why, and what we were doing about it. It was a productive meeting, but it had been too long delayed.

The next week we received the good news that the community college was to be one of the few county supported agencies to receive additional funding. The management team and I revised the budget, and the Board in time approved a 5.5 percent increase for all faculty and staff as well as an additional increment for the lowest salaried faculty members.

Ironically, the local school board, which had bargained for an eight percent increase, was forced by county funding limitations to reduce their offer to six percent.

There was more happiness among community college faculty and staff than among the public school teachers. We had come through the ordeal successfully, but I had learned much in the process, especially about the importance of communication when salary dollars are on the line.

The End of the Beginning

Exams were over. The myriad of spring celebrations had been concluded. We had toasted our finest students at an honors banquet, watched our final college baseball game, enjoyed a play, wrapped up the budget, and observed the bulldozers beginning to tear apart the ground for our new building.

It was late May. The world was alive with blossoms and flowers and the leaves on the trees were still perfect, unmolested as yet by worms and moths. It was time for commencement.

Of course it was warm! It was always warm in the Field House on commencement Sunday. Parents and siblings manifested quiet pride. We all marched in with impatient dignity. One of our honors students presented a commencement address along with a leading community citizen.

I smiled broadly when I rose to award the college's first honorary degree. Our smiling recipient was seated in a wheel chair to my left. On the preceding Tuesday she had fallen and broken her hip. The following day Margaret Carpenter turned 95. But on that commencement Sunday afternoon she insisted on getting out of her hospital bed and coming to the college to receive her associate degree in person. Her face was lined with age under her academic cap, but her brown eyes were alive with youthful vitality as I presented her degree. That semester she had studied fourth year French and an introductory computer course.

The audience rose as one and applauded her accomplishments. What a testament to lifelong learning! What a symbol of the impact of a community college within its community!

A Final Word

During March, April, and May I lived in anticipation of June. At last it arrived. The fifty, sixty and occasional seventy hour weeks, frequently crammed with evening activities, were over. I could finally clean my desk. My associate, Mrs. Woodfield, could finally tackle some filing. Summer school always seems to run uneventfully.

Much had been accomplished; much remained to be done. Somehow faculty and staff had guided the new president through his first year with patience and kindness. There appeared to be a new vitality and pride alive in the college. Initiative was increasing; so was internal communication. It was obvious that during the second year I would be able to concentrate more energies on external relations and the development of college friends in the community. As the year ended we appointed a task force representative of the total college to begin planning around the theme, Promoting Student Success. This focus would be a primary goal during our second year.

As Marj and I headed West in early July, I reflected on so much that had happened. Mistakes had been made. Some hard lessons had been learned. But all in all, it had been a very good year.

We were on our way to see the West, to visit family and friends, and to travel to Vail, Colorado, to attend the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges' Presidents Academy Summer Institute. At last, I was to learn how to become an effective college president.

Postscript from a Faculty Member

The announcement in the college newspaper, The FCC Chronicle, in March of 1985 was the verification of what we had heard at the Board of Trustees meeting the previous month. "President to Resign" the headline stated, and it became the forerunner of a year of gossip, speculation, and concern among faculty and staff. Who would be chosen to replace President Jack Kussmaul? What kind of changes might occur at the college? Could we adjust to them?

I began to feel uneasy. Like many of us, I savored the security of the "known" even though I also enjoyed being challenged by new ideas. But after six years at Frederick Community College as a part-time instructor and three years as a full-time assistant professor of English, I had established a good working relationship with our president, Dr. Kussmaul. Why did he have to retire now?

Over the ensuing months we exhausted ourselves with endless possibilities about who might be chosen as the new college president, most of us opting in favor of candidates "known." The Board of Trustees asked for faculty input in the form of a profile of what we would like to see in our next college president. An answer was drawn up and we finally sat back to await the results.

Eleven months after Dr. Kussmaul had announced his resignation, the Chronicle announced "FCC's Next President Named," confirming what we had already heard -- that a Dr. Lee J. Betts, President of Muscatine Community College in Iowa, would become the fifth President of Frederick Community College. Muscatine, where was it? Most of us flew to an atlas to find out. "He'll probably bring all his own staff with him," I thought sulkily, "and before you know it heads will be rolling." I think I envisioned 6'6" Midwesterners in hip length snow boots and caps with flapping earmuffs invading FCC en masse and barking out orders.

At a college-wide dinner in January of 1986 we finally met our new president and his wife Marjorie. I grudgingly admitted to being pleasantly surprised by the firm handclasp, the direct look, and the enthusiasm with which all of us were greeted. Lee's wife, Marjorie, radiated a quieter delight, but it was clear that the two of them were enjoying themselves immensely. As he invited us to share his hope of making Frederick Community College the finest college of its size in the nation, Dr. Betts referred occasionally to Marjorie as "my best friend." I suddenly realized that, after seven years of college life with a confirmed bachelor president, a new and exciting dimension would be added to FCC's social scene with the appearance of a president's wife.

Between January and June of 1986, while we waited for the formal arrival of our new president, the tempo picked up a bit. I became increasingly involved with attempts to form a Faculty Association, a move that had been spearheaded by two other faculty members who had taken the initiative in gathering constitutions of like organizations at other Maryland community

colleges. A large segment of the faculty was interested in having some voice in college decision-making. Although we had a college-wide Senate, we wanted an organization that would focus on the particular needs and views of the faculty. Approximately eight of us hammered away at refining and clarifying a constitution that would reflect everything we wanted to do and be. By the time Dr. Betts arrived in June, the constitution had been completed; it was accepted by a majority of the faculty. Now the big test was to come: how would the new president react?

Our first year with our new president was a whirlwind of surprises. Those of us who might have been leery of his initial enthusiasm as being "put on" soon found out that it was not only genuine but infectious. The majority of us became caught up in a searching appraisal of our institution -- a kind of eternal spring cleaning that went on for a full year as we examined who we were, what we wanted to be, and how we would get there. We appeared to be in constant collision, joining one committee after another and working out new approaches to running the college. No one worked harder than the president, whose enthusiasm never waned. He not only wanted our suggestions; he would act on them.

By January of 1987, the half-way mark of our first year together, a noticeable difference crept into some of our conversations. We were becoming exhausted. When the president's car was noticed -- still in the college parking lot at 10:00 p.m. -- some of us would grumble, "Why doesn't he go home?" One high-ranking administrator said, frankly, at a meeting, "I think we need to stop now and take an overall look at what

we've been working on, get a narrower perspective of just what we're about instead of pushing for any more new ideas." He was right. Any more committees would be "overkill."

Two significant events for me came in the latter part of the year. First, Dr. Betts wholeheartedly supported a Faculty Association and was open and encouraging in asking for faculty representation in areas where it had never before been considered. Some passages in the Association's constitution had to be negotiated with him, but we finally had a document that was presented to and accepted by the Board of Trustees. Second, the Association became embroiled in a raging controversy over the way the budget had been handled as regarded recommendations for salary increases. Had we been let down? Had the president really intended we would only get a two percent increase when teachers in the public schools would get six percent. This was a tense period. I talked with the president frankly about how the faculty felt and he lost his temper.

Looking back later I realized that was a significant moment. I had worked so closely with the president during the year that I may have reached the point where I felt he could do no wrong. Indeed if he had walked on water I would not have been in the least surprised. Now I realized he was, after all, human like the rest of us. This realization gave a sensible balance to our working relationship. When he came to a Faculty Association meeting to discuss the salary issue with us frankly, some of the air was cleared. It finally settled when the county commissioners granted us further funds to keep our salary increases in line with the rest of the county.

The experience with salaries, occurring close to the end of our first year with Lee Betts, was sobering and useful.... rather like going through labor pains together. In the long run mutual respect between president and college colleagues was, I believe, improved.

As we began to move toward the start of a second year, we all felt we knew our "new" president much better. He was hard-working, outgoing, friendly, extremely capable, interested in others. He had a temper -- but toes that were stepped on were crunched, usually, quietly and out of sight. Much to our surprise he had not come to us with an entourage of faithful followers who would replace us. The one member of his "entourage" was Marjorie, whose gracious charm makes her one of Lee Betts' greatest assets. I think we have a sense of "team" now, recognizing that we all have a job to do together -- making the college function better for its students, being innovative, enhancing our ties with the community in which we live. It says much for Lee and Marjorie Betts that they pull their weight with us -- not standing apart on their "dignities" but wading in with the rest of us as "one of the gang" in doing work we enjoy.

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